

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 IO-13 OMB-01 ACDA-12 DRC-01 /103 W
-----126904 020249Z /62

R 261225Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 859
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CHANGE MRN TO READ 3014 VICE 592/)

3.O.11652: NA
TAGS: PGOV TS
SUBJ: INDEPENDENT RUNS IN BIZERTE BY-ELECTION

1. BY-ELECTIONS FOR VACANT NATIONAL ASSTOTP SEAT
REPRESENTING BIZERTE WAS HELD SUNDAY, APRIL 23. TO
NO ONE'S SURPRISE, PSD CANDIDATE MOKHTAR TEBOURBI WON
HANDS DOWN. HE WILL REPLACE PREVIOUS INCUMBENT WHO
WAS OBLIGED TO RESIGN
AFTER HAVING BEEN NAMED CHEF DE
CABINET TO MINISTER OF INTERIOR. (THIS POSITION CARRIES
RANK OF GOVERNOR WHICH IS "INCOMPATIBLE" ACCORING TO
TUNISIAN LAW WITH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERSHIP.
2. UNUSUAL ASPECT OF ELECTION WAS THAT FOR FIRST TIME
SINCE 1959 MORE THAN ONE ASPIRANTANYONE OTHER THAN SINGLE PSD CAND-
IDATE WAS RUNNING FOR SAME SEAT. THE NON-PSD CANDIDATE WAS MOHAMED
BEJAOUI(NO RTO IGON TO PREVIOUS INCUMBENT OF SAME LAST NAME)
WHO RAN AS AN "INDEPENDENT.") BEJAOUI, A SCHOOL TEACHER FROM MATEUR
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NOW RESIDENT IN BIZERTE, IS NOT POLITICALLY PROMINENT
AND WAS VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN OUTSIDE HIS IMMEDIATE CIRCLE.
HIS CAMPAIGN, WHICH WAS MILDLY REFORMIST IN TONE, WAS
POOLY ORGANIZED AND DID NOT MAKE WIDE IMPRESSION.
REPORTEDLY HE ALSO SUFFERED FROM LACK OF FUNDS AND
CAMPAIGN MATERIAL WAS LIMITED TO SOME SIMPLE HANDBILLS
PRINTED IN TUNIS. (REFERENCE HAS BEEN MADE TO"DIFFICULTY"

GETTING THEM PRINTED IN BIZERTE.) BEJAOUH AHD LITTLE CHANCE OF WINNING IN VIEW OF STRONG PSD ORGANIZATION AND HIS OWN INEFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN, BUT HE DID RELEATIVELY WELL IN VIEW CIRCUMSTANCES. RESULTS WERE 82,341 OR 95 PERCENT FOR PSD CANDIDATE TEBOURBI; 3,956 OR FIVE PERCENT FOR BEJAOUH (86,451 VOTING OUT OF 97,209 ELIGIBLE).

3. MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN BEJAOUH'S SMALL PERCENTAGE OF VOTES IS FACT THAT HE RAN AT ALL AND STAYED IN RACE TO END. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT PSD WAS UNHAPPY ABOUT UNPRECEDENTED PROSPECT OF CHALLENGE FROM AN INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE AND THAT GOVERNMENT DRAGGED FEET IN APPROVING BEJAOUH'S APPLICATIONS TO BE PLACED ON BALLOT. IN VIEW OF FACT THAT THIS IS FIRST SUCH INSTANCE IN ALMOST NINETEEN YEARS, IT COULD WELL BE A FORERUNNER OF THINGS TO COME.

4. WE UNDERSTAND FROM SOCIAL DEMOCRAT ACTIVIST THAT BEJAOUH APPROACHED GROUP SEVERAL MONTHS AGO WITH REQUEST FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRAT BACKING. RESPONSE WAS THAT WHILE THEY WISHED HIM WELL, SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WOULD STEP INTO ELECTION ARENA ONLY AT TIME AND PLACE OF THEIR CHOOSING, AND WITH SOCIAL DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE OF KNOWN REPUTATION. THEY TOOK PRAGMATIC VIEW THAT IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO RISK SOCIAL DEMOCRATS "INCREASING PRESTIGE" BY BACKING AN UNKNOWN WITH NO CHANCE OF SUCCESS.

MULCAHY

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NNN

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